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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

JONES, James W SCS
KATSARIS, Maria
417

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/[illegible]MR

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TO : File

DATE: December 15, 1977

FROM : CONS/RAMcCoy

SUBJECT: PEOPLE'S TEMPLE

On December 12, I held a long ~~discussion (two hours)~~ with three members of the People's Temple at their request. They were concerned about the motive behind my intended visit to Jonestown next month. As usual, I explained to them that there were still allegations being made against them in the United States about holding people against their will here and as a result, I was receiving inquiries through the Department of State from relatives to have personal contact with members to insure their well being. I informed them that they should not conclude from this that I believe these allegations or was in some way carrying out a quasi judicial action. This was simply part of my responsibility as the American Consul in Guyana.

In addition, I also pointed out to them that eventually I would have to be doing social security compliance requests in which I would have to confirm for the Social Security Administration (SSA) that recipients of social security benefits were alive and well. However, this program did not just pertain to retired members of the People's Temple but to all SSA annuitants in Guyana.

At the same time I pointed out that I was prepared to assist them any time when they had any problems such as with the recent death case, reporting births, passport services and any other function where they may need assistance. I continued that by travelling to Jonestown it would obviate the need for a number of elderly people to have to make a long, arduous trip to Georgetown.

At the same time I emphasized that I had not made a trip since the last part of August and since that period I have received a number of inquiries from individuals in the United States asking about the health and well being of their relatives residing in Jonestown. I was aware that the People's Temple may feel persecuted by certain elements in the United States but they should understand that I have a job to perform and I would try to perform it as objectively as possible - I was as much their Consul as anybody else's and that with 800 American citizens living up there, I was naturally interested in their welfare. On the other hand I had no wish to intrude

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on their privacy. Moreover, to the best of my knowledge, the People's Temple is not under active Federal investigation nor are there any warrants of arrest issued by any United States Law Enforcement Agency. If such were the case, then the Guyanese Police Officials would carry out any arrests since I did not have this type of authority. I remarked that it appeared to me the more times I go up to Jonestown and visit the area and am able to comment to Washington that there does not appear to be anyone held against their will, etc., the less inquiries on the safety and well being of their members we will receive. The three members acknowledged this by stating that they really wanted to be sure that I was objective. They had heard reports that I was a member of the CIA and that at times they had seen me in the company of Jeffrey Haas and that I had met with Steven Katsaris. I replied that by now with all that has passed with these problems, they should know that I do not take sides and as the Consul here it was only proper that Steven Katsaris come to see me since that is a part of my job. I would be very happy to show up at court with the members of the People's Temple as I would with anybody else. They simply had to understand that I was interested in their welfare and certainly interested in the John Stoen custody case since all the disputants were American citizens. I continued that I still feel it was absolutely ridiculous for the Katsaris girl to show up with an attorney when she met with her father. The three individuals disputed this last statement of mine claiming that she wanted the attorney with her so that her father could not intimidate her. I responded that how could her father intimidate her when I was there, the Guyanese Ambassador to the United States was there as were several other members of the People's Temple.

At this point, our conversation covered the allegations of psychological intimidation by members of the People's Temple, the alleged embezzlement by Bishop Jones on social security checks and the conspiracy that is being conducted against the People's Temple by elements in the United States. When I challenged them to indicate to me who "they" were, the group responded by showing me a book in which purportedly 80 prominent American blacks had been subjected to various investigations by Federal Agencies. I reiterated that first of all I did not believe the CIA would be interested in them and secondly, that at the present time U. S. investigative agencies do not conduct witch hunts. Furthermore, I was unaware of any investigative

interest on the part of the United States toward the People's Temple. One member pointed out that a recent shipment of machinery and household effects destined for the community had been opened by U. S. Customs and searched. Also for the first time here in Guyana they were experiencing difficulty in clearing this shipment through Guyana Customs, even though it had been thoroughly searched by Guyanese Customs Officials and they had duty free import licenses for the contents. They asked whether I could assist them to get the items cleared. I agreed and called Dennis Corlette, Head of Customs, on their behalf. He was not in so I spoke to his secretary who agreed to put them in contact with the person who could help them. I remarked to the group that it is not easy to clear items through customs these days and gave them the example of the problems I had clearing my son's shotgun.

Essentially, the remainder of the meeting continued in this vein. There was much 'to-ing and fro-ing' and discussing of conspiracy allegations, future trips by Consular Officers and further problems.

COMMENT:

Apparently, what triggered this visit at this time was my comments that I would be going to Jonestown next month. This coincides, reportedly, with the arrival of Grace and Timothy Stoen to Guyana to claim custody of their son, John, so the group connected the two. I am not sure whether I was able to convince them that I am truly objective and that I would really prefer there were no problems. In closing, I simply emphasized to them that they would be able to judge for themselves of the role of the Embassy in all this. I told the group I enjoyed the dialogue and they should feel free to contact me at any time to continue it.

C.C. Ambassador
DCM

CONS:RAMcCoy:ddh